

# The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, August 29. 1693.

SIR,

Quest. I. **I** Having been a Member of the late East-India Company, formerly took an Oath to them as follows:

"YOU do sincerely Promise and Swear, that you will be Faithfull, and bear true Allegiance to our Sovereign Lord the King's Majesty, and to his Heirs and Successors, and that you will be Faithfull to the Governour, his Deputy, and Company of Merchants of London, Trading to the East-Indies, in the Management of their Trade, the Secrets of the said Company which shall be given you in Charge to conceal, by the said Governour or his Deputy, you will not disclose; and during the present Joint-Stock of this Company you will not Trade in any such Commodity and Commodities whatsoever, to or from the Limits of the Companies Charter, beyond the Cape of Good Hope, which the Court of Committees have or shall declare from time to time, that they do or will reserve the said Joint-Stock exclusive to any others. So Help you GOD.

And their Charter being now adjudged Void by Act of Parliament, for their making Default in Payment of the Tax charged on their Joint-Stock, at the time limited in the said Act, and the Voidance thereof being admitted by the King's Counsel learned in the Law, and also by those who act now as Governour, Deputy Governour, and Committees of the late Company, who are endeavouring to be restor'd by a New Incorporation.

I desire to know if I am not discharged from the said Oath taken to the late East-India Company? and whether I may not Trade to or from the East Indies as freely as any other Person, who never was a Member of the said Company, nor ever took any Oath to them?

Ans. The Oath taken to the late East-India Company, not to Trade during the Continuance of the Joint-Stock, to or from the Limits of their Charter, in such Commodities as shall from time to time be reserved to the Joint-Stock, exclusive to all others, cannot have a longer force or Obligation than during the Continuance of that Body to which the Oath was taken, and to whom that Joint-Stock did belong, to whose Continuance the Oath was limited.

And the Oath being taken to the East-India Company, who were Incorporated by Charter from the Crown, if the Charter by which they were incorporated a Body is Void and Determined, the Company and the Joint-Stock of the Company, both which had their Creation and Subsistence from that Charter, must unavoidably cease to be, when the Charter is ceased by which they were Created and did Subsist, so that the very Foundation of the Obligation being ceased, the Obligation itself can no longer continue.

And therefore if the Charter of the East-India Company be Ceased and Determined, you are certainly Discharged from any Obligation arising by the Oath taken to them, and may Trade to or from the East-Indies as freely as if you had never been a Member of that Company, or had never taken any Oath to them.

As the preceding Answer is Verbatim what a worthy Gentleman, and learned in the Law, has given, We think We can add no more to it, he having already Observ'd all that may be said upon the Subject, and to which we very readily Subscribe, thinking the Case is very plain and easie.

Quest. 2. Dr. Brown's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* tells us in Chap. 6. page 16, and 17. that the Fable of Orpheus, who by the Melody of his Musick made Woods and Trees to follow him, was raised upon a slender Foundation; for there were a Crew of Mad Women retired unto a Mountain, from whence being Pacified by his Musick, they descended with Boughs in their Hands, which unto the Fabulosity of those times, proved a sufficient ground to Celebrate unto Posterity the Magick of Orpheus's Harp, and its Power to attract the senseless Trees about it.

That Medea, the famous Sorceress, could renew Youth, and make Old Men Young again, was nothing else, but that from the Knowledge of Simples she had a Receipt to make White Hair Black, and reduce Old Heads into the Tincture of Youth again.

The Fable of Gerion and Cerberus with three Heads, was this: Gerion was of the City Tricarania, that is, of three Heads, and Cerberus of the same place was one of his Doggs, which running into a Cave upon pursuit of his Master's Oxen, Hercules per-force drew him out of that place, from whence the Conceits of those Dayes affirmed no less than that Hercules descended into Hell, and brought up Cerberus into the Habitation of the Living.

Upon the like grounds was raised the Figment of Briareus, who dwelling in a City called Hebratonchiria, the Fancies of those times assigned him a hundred Hands.

That Niobe Weeping over her Children was turned into a Stone, was nothing else but that during her Life she erected over their Sepulchres a Marble Tomb of her own: And many of this Nature.

Pray your Thoughts upon his Definitions in his Treatise abovesaid, together with these Fables, and doubtless you will Oblige many who are too apt to run into Vulgar Errors?

Ans. Much like the first Story is that of Amphion and Letus, who drew Stones with their Harmony to the Building of Thebes, by which (as is generally believ'd) is only meant that their Musick being new and taking, the Thebanes agreed with 'em to carry Stones thither, upon Admittance of being their Auditors; and so of innumerable more. Mostly We believe these Fictions of the Poets were only intended as the Fables of Aesop, having an Honest and Moral Design at the Bottom, for the Encouragement of Virtue and Discouragement of Vice, such strange kind of Stories often winning more upon the Judgment of Ordinary People than a Lesson of Cato, or an Harangue of Cicero himself: Look in almost any Dictionary, and you will meet with enough such Instances.

Quest. 3. I desire to know what Notion you have of the World's Infancy? I will suppose them multiply'd to 50000, Men, Women and Children: What was their Food? if upon Living Creatures, whether these were Appropriated or in Common? if appropriated, What Necessities or Reasons induc'd 'em to't, when they had so much room, and Plenty of all Creatures? if in Common, whether the Fair Sex were not so too, one great Cause of Marriage not being then existent; that is to say, for a Man to have Children of his own to Inherit his own proper Estate? Your Instruction about this Matter may be very acceptable to your, &c.

Ans. Admit your Supposition; admit also your own Dilemma, if they were appropriated; (as its very probable) what can be more Natural than for a Man to be Master of something himself. Why are you willing to appropriate a Wife, the Reputation of a Wit (if you could be so,) but only from a Principle of Your own dear self in the Case? But suppose living Creatures were not appropriated, which we cannot admit 'till better Presumptions are offer'd, is't not a Principle even in Brutes



to oppose their Rivals, and claim a Propriety in the Female; besides all the Reason and Justice which is super-added to reasonable Creatures. *Lastly*, It will not follow that Men only get Children to Inherit Estates, for if so, what will become of younger Brothers. It's hardly Credible, that any Person, gentle or simple, is much troubled about the Thoughts of Inheritance and Succession in the Act of Generation; but perhaps, Sir, you were an only Child, and We shall say no more o'th' Case, for fear of Disobliging you.

*Quest. 4. Gentlemen, I am a Baker by Trade, and it hath been a Case of Conscience to me a long time, Whether or no I ought to Bake any thing (tho' but what is just convenient to serve my Customers) on the Lords-Day, seeing I don't hoard up the Money I then get with the Common Stock, but always distribute it to the Poor; and if I should singly make a Scruple and Disoblige my Customers, I must consequently lose my Maintenance, which depends wholly upon my Calling; yet notwithstanding shall willingly submit, and for the future Act according to your Sentiments upon the Matter, whether in the Negative to my disadvantage, or in the affirmative to my profit and advantage? Your speedy return will Oblige many others besides your Humble Servant.*

*Ans.* Yes, We think it very lawful, provided you make no Gain of it, or (which is yet better) if you give it to the Poor. That Scruple about Disobliging your Customers, and losing your Maintenance, ought not to be started, for if it had been a Sin, that would have been no Excuse to you, for you ought to have an honest Reliance upon Providence; tho' indeed there are some (to give it the mildest Term) Inconveniences which will necessarily attend you, and you must be very carefull not to employ your Servants on that Day, so as to hinder them from Divine Service at least once.

*Quest. 5. What think ye of the Story of Sebastian King of Portugal? Was he really kill'd in the Battle with the Moors, or are you of Opinion that he escaped, and what are we to judge of that Person, who appeared some years after in Italy, and so confidently assum'd that Name and Title?*

*Ans.* The Stress of all the other Questions lies in the last — Whether that Person who took the Name of Sebastian some years after he was thought to be dead, were the real King Sebastian, or only an Impostor, like our Perkin, or any of those little Kings in the Reign of Henry the VIIIth. A knot we confess not easily untid, it being much easier to tell you what we think, than what was the infallible Truth in this matter. However the probabilities are very strong on one side, and that's the Affirmative; for tho' we can't say it amounts to a Demonstration; we think there are very many strange Circumstances in the story, which we see not how 'tis possible to Answer, that this Person was the very King of Portugal. The first is — that all who ever saw him, and had known him before, acknowledged him the same Person, and that of all Ranks and Qualities, at least that he was so like Don Sebastian, that they could not distinguish between 'em; but verily believ'd this was he. The second — his knowing all, even the most Minute Circumstances of that Kings Life, his Relatives, his most Secret Affairs, never being trap'd in one thing which might betray an Imposture, which had there been any such, the cunning Spaniards cou'd not but have smelt it out. Add to this, his admirably strict and mortify'd Life, chosen and continued in His Patience, His Humility, and Constancy in all his Sufferings, being the same in the Prison and Gallies, and to the last affirming himself what we are apt to believe he was, at least, if those Relations be true which we have of him. After all, if the Spaniards had not been Conscious there had been something more in't than Imposture, why did they not punish this unfortunate Person with something worse than Imprisonment and Ignominy? Either with some corporal Infliction, or a publick Traitors Death? But instead of all this, however they got rid of him in Private; 'tis said, that he was not us'd as a Slave, when on the Gallies of Naples, he was never chain'd to an Oar as the rest were, but liv'd a Slave in nothing but Name, and had two other Slaves to attend him. On the whole we shall only add this — that if he were the real Sebastian he had hard for-

tune, if not, he had too good, but was certainly the most subtle Impostor that ever appear'd in the World.

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